

LESSON 5D—NARRATIVE: WHO IS AN ARCHAEOLOGIST WHO STUDIES ANCIENT SHELTER?

John H. Brumley is an archaeologist who studies ancient forms of shelter.

John H. Brumley is an archaeologist who studies ancient shelter, or the types of homes ancient people used. John specializes in the study of tipi rings, or circles of stones commonly found on the plains. He became seriously interested in tipi rings while directing a research program near Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. The majority of the 890 sites the program inventoried consisted of tipi rings. John has since worked to improve the techniques for excavating tipi rings. He has also developed new methods of recording tipi rings and procedures to interpret and understand what is found at tipi ring sites.

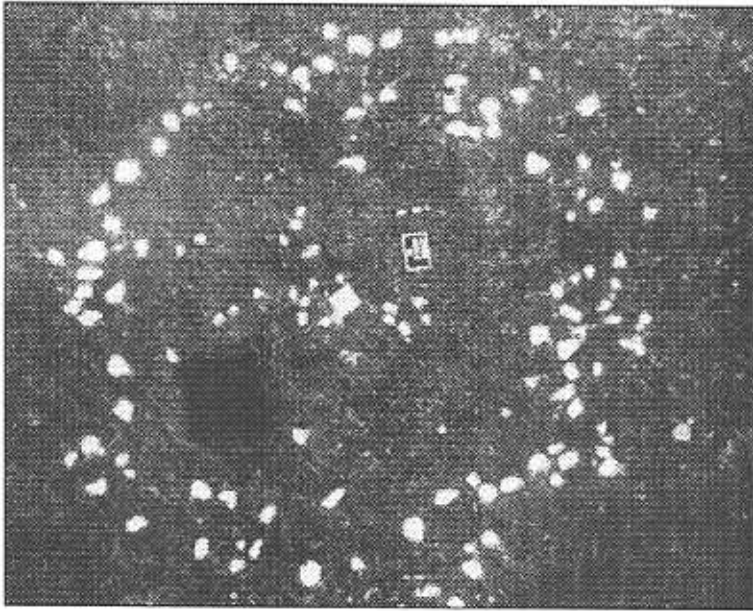
John's interest in archaeology began at age eleven when he joined the Milk River Archaeological Society in his hometown of Havre, Montana. The adult members encouraged his interest and helped him obtain his first professional archaeological work with the Smithsonian Institution, River Basin Surveys, in South Dakota. John attended Northern Montana College, Havre, and the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, receiving his Master's degree in 1976.

John has worked as an assistant director, crew chief, field director, project director, and contractor on archaeological projects throughout the plains of Montana and Canada. His Canadian projects include the Fort Laird Archaeological Project, Northwest Territories, and in Alberta, the Waterton Park Archaeological Project and Suffield

Archaeological Project. In 1985, John established his own archaeological business in Havre, Ethos Consultants Inc. He manages and oversees all company activities. John has also taught archaeological classes, and he has authored, and co-authored, nearly three hundred publications and reports, including articles in the journal, *Archaeology in Montana*.

John finds challenge in studying prehistoric Native American archaeology because less is known about that period. He also enjoys historic research. He finds that historical documentation and written accounts relate to prehistoric Indian cultures and help him in interpreting the past. The harsh conditions described by early travelers in Montana impress John. He is most intrigued to understand how historic, and by analogy prehistoric, people managed to survive in such conditions. The hardiness and resilience of these people inspires him!

John's favorite Montana site is Wahnkpa Chu'gn, near Havre. Wahnkpa Chu'gn is a major buffalo kill and campsite. It was used extensively by Indian people from approximately two thousand years ago to six hundred years ago. It is the most thoroughly studied bison kill site in Montana. John is credited with discovering the site when he was twelve years old! At Wahnkpa Chu'gn, he has assisted with excavations, directed several research efforts, and published the results. John and his wife, Anna, direct the public



John Brumley developed and built his own method for taking accurate pictures of tipi rings. As shown here, he uses a remote camera on a photo boom attached to his truck to take photos from above. He has whitewashed the stones in the circle with flour to make them show up better. *John Brumley, photographer.*

interpretive program at the site, which is open to visitors. The exhibits within the campsite and kill site display massive quantities of buffalo bones and artifacts, illustrate past Indian life-ways, and show methods of archaeology. Also present at Wahkpa Chu'gn are dioramas including life-sized human and bison figures; these dioramas further interpret prehistoric use.

John says that the easiest part of his job is the field work, going out and looking for sites or excavating them. He enjoys the physical work that gets him outdoors. The most difficult, and most important, part of his work is back in the office. John must describe on paper what he did in the field, what he found, and what a particular site tells about the past so others can clearly understand it.

John feels fortunate to have worked at a number of unusual and fascinating sites. In two of the most interesting projects, John has used ethnographic information—knowledge drawn from existing native cultures—

to interpret prehistoric sites. One such site was a medicine wheel that was radiocarbon dated to about A.D. 1300–1400. A medicine wheel is a ceremonial site made up of a large rock circle or cairn, with several rock alignments. John was able to interpret the medicine wheel in detail by using information recorded for almost identical historic Blackfeet structures. The other site was a prehistoric antelope trap, approximately 3,600 years old. Again, ethnographic Blackfeet information provided details on similar historic structures. John then used this information to interpret the archaeological site.

John made another exciting discovery at a medicine wheel site that also contained a large number of tipi rings. With flour paste, his archaeological team painted the medicine wheel and tipi rings on the ground and then photographed them from the air. The aerial photographs revealed that the people who had lived at this site had arranged many of the tipi rings to form a camp circle. Camp circles are often described in historic ethnographic literature for Plains Indian groups, but they are rarely discovered in the archaeological record.

John says that the best sites, including tipi ring sites, are those that contain a number of characteristics. They have good stratigraphy—stacked levels of earth and artifacts—so that materials from different time periods are not mixed together. They also contain organic materials, such as charcoal and bone, which allows them to be radiocarbon dated. At those sites that include well-preserved bone, archaeologists can identify the animals

that the site's prehistoric residents hunted and which time of year people occupied the site. Sites with projectile points or pottery tell which ancient cultures occupied the site. Sites that contain all these characteristics are rare. But they are the ones in which John most likes to work because they have the potential to provide quality information.

John particularly enjoys analyzing faunal, or animal, remains recovered from archaeological sites. Faunal remains frequently present the best view on specific animals hunted and eaten at a site, and they help archaeologists determine which animal parts were most used by prehistoric people. John also likes to use the faunal analysis techniques that help scientists determine what season of the year animals were killed, and he likes to investigate which times of the year a site was occupied.

When asked what he believes the future holds for archaeology, John responded: "I think archaeology is on the verge of a new frontier. Until recently, we had only enough information to make general statements about the prehistoric people of Montana. Now, archaeologists have excavated and reported on enough sites so that we have a more detailed picture of how various prehistoric people lived. We are even beginning to be able to relate prehistoric archaeological cultures to specific historic Indian groups."

John suggests that students interested in archaeology should study science and history. Computer knowledge and math skills, he notes, are critical during site interpretation. Take



John Brumley's interest in archaeology began at the age of eleven. He still lives in his hometown of Havre, Montana, where he operates his privately owned archaeological business known as Ethos Consultants, Inc. Anna Brumley, photographer.

tours of archaeological sites open to the public, and get involved with events and excavations in which you can volunteer. He also suggests joining a archaeology group such as the Montana Archaeological Society.

John's message to you is: "The important thing an archaeological site gives us is not the pretty artifacts or bones it contains. The important thing is the information those items can provide about the past peoples who left them there."

When John is not involved in archaeology, he enjoys time with his wife, Anna, and their children Flint Lachenmeier and Sara Brumley Bennett. John also spends time hiking, canoeing, hunting, and fishing. Students interested in archaeology may contact John at:

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